

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 18, 2010

Agenda Item: Parks Division Biennial Fee Rule

Division: Parks

Action Needed: Tentative: Final: X None/Informational Item: _____

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 minutes

Background: The Parks Biennial Fee Rule establishes fees and associated rules for the State Park System and Fishing Access Sites. The rule identifies fees for entrance to state parks (nonresidents), camping at state parks and fishing access sites, facility rental, guided tours (e.g. Lewis and Clark Caverns), and Special Uses. Fees are an important component of the Parks Division budget and help to maintain sites, provide safe facilities and services to the public, and protect park resources. The commission last increased camping fees in 2002. The biennial fee rule also provides direction to staff for managing visitor use, e.g. occupancy limits at campsites, and developing the campsite reservation program. The Commission instructed the department to solicit comments on proposed changes to the fee rule and report back at the November 18 meeting. For more information:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/parks/management/biennialFeeRule.html>

Public Involvement Process & Results: The parks division conducted a 45-day comment period and 25 people submitted comments (the division also received a petition prior to the comment period expressing concern over camping fees at Cooney State Park). A majority of the comments supported an increase in camping fees at state parks, a nonresident camping fee that includes an entrance fee, a \$10 state park campsite reservation convenience fee, and an increase in tour fees at Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park. A majority opposed the proposed increase in camping fees at fishing access sites. In general, supporters of increasing state park camping fees acknowledged the cost of providing a quality state park system. Those opposed to increasing fees cited the poor economy, expressed concern that the proposed fees would make camping at state park unaffordable for families and lower income households, and noted that some parks offer a reduced level of services and therefore the camping fee should be less. There were no comments on the remainder of the proposed changes.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Alternative A: Adopt rule as originally proposed (no changes to tentative rule).

Alternative B: Adopt rule as originally proposed with the following additional amendments: 1) strike the proposed increase in camping fees at fishing access sites; 2) add language that would allow the parks division administrator to reduce or waive fees to increase utilization of a park, promote special events, respond to dissatisfied visitors, or for parks with a lower level of services; and 3) add language prohibiting someone from occupying a campsite that has already been reserved or paid for by someone else.

Alternative C: Retain current version of the fee rule (no changes).

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The parks division recommends that the Commission adopt **Alternative B**. Adding language allowing the parks division administrator to reduce or waive fees would enable the department to reduce camping fees at state parks that offer fewer amenities or services. This would also allow the division to promote special events and increase utilization of parks. Retaining the current camping fees for fishing access sites is consistent with the public comments and takes into account the lower level of services present at most fishing access sites. Language prohibiting someone from occupying a campsite that has already been reserved or paid for would address a problem that has occurred at some campgrounds and could become more frequent with the implementation of the reservation program.

Proposed Motion: "I move that the Commission approve the final Parks Division Biennial Fee Rule proposed by the department, including the aforementioned amendments to the tentative rule (Alternative B)."